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Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

Written statement* submitted by Human Rights Advocates Inc., a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[14 February 2015]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Mega-Events and the Right to Housing

I. Introduction

Mega-events such as the Olympics and FIFA World Cup are often breeding grounds for violations of the right to adequate housing. Forced evictions and other actions have violated the rights of people in host communities, with the majority of the violations committed against people living in poverty and indigenous peoples. The Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living has issued a major report on this topic,[1] and the Human Rights Council (HRC) addressed these issues through resolutions.

In 2010, the HRC passed a resolution on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, in the context of mega-events.[2] The resolution called upon governments to "integrate housing concerns into the bidding and planning process at an early stage and, in this regard, to assess the impact on the affected population throughout the process," and "to explore alternatives to evictions and to undertake any such evictions as may be necessary in accordance with the domestic legal framework and in full compliance with the relevant provisions of international human rights law, including those for adequate and effective remedies."[3]

In 2014, the HRC adopted another resolution which reinforced their apprehensions regarding housing.[4] It expressed deep concerns and called upon governments "to give due consideration to the human right to adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and to issues related to universal access to decent and sustainable housing in the elaboration of the post-2015 development agenda."[5]

Despite these positive measures, evidence shows that countries continue to violate these principles when hosting mega-events. In addition to these resolutions, the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights provide a framework for protecting the right to adequate housing, both by states and private actors, in the context of mega-events. There is evidence of recent and present human rights abuses which must be remedied, and work must be done to prevent future violations.

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[1] Report of the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context, A/HRC/13/20 (18 Dec. 2009).

[2] Adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, in the context of mega-events, A/HRC/RES/13/10 (14 Apr. 2010).

[3] *Id.*

[4] Adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living , A/HRC/RES/25/17 (14 Apr. 2014).

[5] *Id.*

II. Recent events

A. Greece

Athens hosted the Olympics in 2004 and, there, Roma people were evicted from their settlements, and homelessness was exacerbated[6] by construction for the 2004 Olympic Games.[7] In 2002, local government officials signed an agreement which stipulated that families that left their homes would receive subsidies to help them temporarily rent alternative accommodations and that the municipality would then permanently relocate and re-house them. Instead, the municipality forced new conditions on the Roma that were not part of the agreement, delayed payments for their subsidies, and failed to fully adhere to its obligations under the contract.[8]

However, Greece also exhibited one positive use for Olympic infrastructure after the mega-event. Athens turned the Olympic Village into affordable housing for people from low-income families, who were assigned housing based on a national lottery. This new community included a health clinic, schools, bus lines, and other infrastructure.[9]

B. Brazil

When Brazil hosted the World Cup in 2014, families in host cities were forced out of their homes without adequate notice, there was a lack of prior consultation with those affected, and adequate alternative housing or legal remedies were not provided. Thousands of people were forcefully evicted, particularly from low-income communities and favelas, to make room for luxury high-priced housing.[10] Brazil must prevent similar abuses in preparation for the 2016 Olympics.

Reports from Amnesty International show that people have been forcefully evicted from their homes in Rio de Janeiro, again without prior notice or consultation, entire communities are fighting imminent eviction, and local businesses have been forced out. Construction projects for infrastructure such as stadiums and bus lines, as well as the modernization of the port, have already involved substantial violations, according to independent research by local

[6] Helen Jefferson Lenskyj, *The Olympic Affordable Housing Legacy and Social Responsibility*, *available at* http://library.la84.org/SportsLibrary/ISOR/ISOR2006r.pdf.

[7] UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), *UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Concluding Observations: Greece*, 7 June 2004, E/C.12/1/Add.97, *available at* http://www.refworld.org/docid/42d26c904.html

[8] *Greece: Preparing for the Olympic Games – Evicting the Roma*, Amnesty International (July 2004), *available at* http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR25/004/2004/en.

[9] Violet Law, *A Problem of Olympic Proportions*, Summer 2006, *available at* http://archive.clamormagazine.org/issues/37/economics.php.

[10] Andrea Dip, *Brazil's 2014 World Cup: Rights Abuses Revealed in Report*, Huffington Post (Dec. 14, 2011), *available at* http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/12/12/brazil-world-cup-abuses_n_1143905.html.

NGOs and international organizations.[11] Authorities there must stop the pattern of abuse by consulting with the local affected populations, ending forced evictions, and providing safeguards and remedies where evictions do occur.

C. Qatar

Qatar will host the World Cup in 2022, and human rights violations are already evident. According to a recent report by the Human Rights Watch, the laborers who are among the workforce preparing for the event face sub-standard and dangerous housing conditions.[12] Migrant workers comprise 94% of the workforce, and most live in labor camps and are vulnerable to human rights violations. While local regulations set high standards for their living conditions, these regulations were shown to have been violated in all six of the labor camps that Human Rights Watch visited. Overcrowding and unsanitary conditions were rampant.[13] Authorities in Qatar must ensure that adequate housing conditions are provided for these laborers, and prevent any forced evictions and other abuses to local populations ahead of the 2022 World Cup.

D. Russia

Forced evictions and other housing rights violations were also evident in Russia before and after the 2014 Sochi Olympics. There, Sochi residents were cut off from public transportation and their communities by the construction of roads and Olympic venues, and were not provided with adequate water or other resources to meet their household needs.[14] While some new homes were provided for Sochi residents who were displaced by construction of Olympic infrastructure, many were not consulted beforehand and were forced to relocate against their will under a law that allowed for the seizure and demolition of privately owned parcels of land in preparation for the Olympics. Residents reported inadequate compensation, harassment, and intimidation.[15]

III. Accountability for Private Actors: FIFA, the IOC, and corporate sponsors

[11] Amnesty International, *Brazil: Forced evictions must not mar Rio Olympics* (Nov. 14, 2011), *available at* https://www.amnesty.org/en/news/brazil-forced-evictions-must-not-mar-rio-olympics-2011-11-14.

[12] Human Rights Watch, *Building a Better World Cup: Protecting Migrant Workers in Qatar Ahead of FIFA 2022* (2012), *available at* http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/qatar0612webwcover_0.pdf.

[13] *Id.*

[14] Human Rights Watch, *Russia: Olympic Construction Devastates Sochi Village* (Dec. 30, 2013.), *available at* http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/12/29/russia-olympic-construction-devastates-sochi-village.

[15] Katya Golubkova and Melissa Akin, *Sochi Olympics 2014: Construction and Forced Evictions Mark Olympic Showcase in Russia*, Huffington Post (Nov. 4, 2012), *available at* http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/11/04/sochi-olympics-2014_n_2070784.html.

Under their own charters and the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, FIFA, the International Olympic Committee (IOC), and their corporate sponsors have a duty to carry out their mandates responsibly when they select host cities, and work with governments to protect the rights of local communities while hosting mega-events. The high demands on governments from these organizations harm local populations, and they must ensure that affected people are consulted and are part of a collaborative effort to ensure that their rights are protected. They must not be complicit in human rights abuses perpetrated in their names, and must publically and unequivocally condemn past and ongoing human rights violations in the states that host mega-events including the Olympics and the World Cup.

In 1999, the IOC adopted Agenda 21: Sport for Sustainable Development,[16] which provides some guidance. This document addresses the social and economic impacts of the Olympics. It defines sustainable development as the need for "economic, social, and political development particularly geared to the benefit of the poorest members of society," and includes boosting housing strategies among the goals identified. The IOC should update this document to reflect current housing concerns, and make it binding.

IV. Recommendations

Human Rights Advocates (HRA) requests that the Human Rights Council:

1) Urge the Working Group on Business and Human Rights to include FIFA and the IOC in its discussions;
2) Urge the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Housing to monitor the topic of mega-events as they relate to the right to adequate housing; and
3) Continue to include the impact of mega-events on the right to housing in their resolutions and reports, and to urge governments to affirmatively protect this right.

HRA also urges FIFA and the IOC to engage in practices that protect the right to housing for communities impacted by their mega-events. This includes working with national and local governments to protect the rights of their communities while hosting mega-events, and using human rights standards as a benchmark for determining host cities.

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[16] Agenda 21: Sport for Sustainable Development (1999), *available at* http://www.olympic.org/Documents/Reports/EN/en_report_300.pdf.